

# OIL ON PAPER: NEW CHALLENGES FOR TWO SPECIALTIES

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## INTRODUCTION

Conservators from the Paintings and Paper Conservation Laboratories at the *Centro Nacional de Conservación y Restauración de Chile (CNCR)* were faced for the first time with the challenge of treating two oil paintings on paper with surface distortions (warping). Treating the warping presented the greatest challenge.

### “Portrait of Pilar Garfías del Fierro”

Raymond Monvoisin - 1844  
National History Museum, Santiago

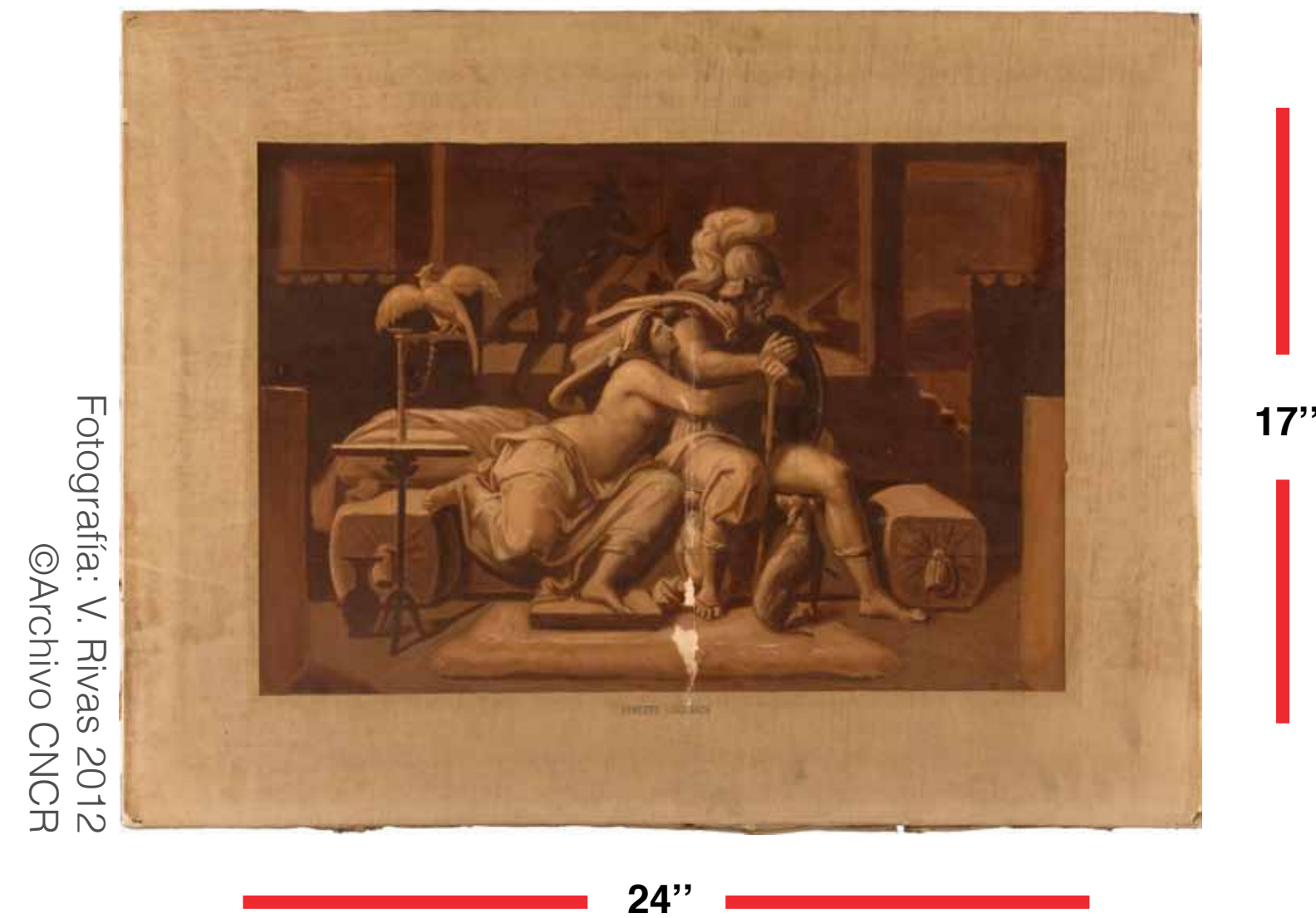


Before Treatment “Portrait of Pilar Garfías del Fierro”

Layers: Paper support, ground, oil based pigments, final protective layer. Paper strips were adhered to the verso of the support along the entire perimeter. The strips, together with the edges of a protective fabric were attached with tacks to a wooden stretcher.

### “Outline: Dido and Eneas”

Ernst Kirchbach 20th Century  
National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago



Before Treatment “Outline: Dido y Eneas”

Layers: Papersupportwithalarger canvasbacking, ground, oil based pigments, final protective layer. The canvas was attached with tacks to a wooden stretcher. A window mat was adhered to the edges of the front side of the painting.

Underdrawings identified in both paintings

Pentimenti

Conceived as an easel painting stretched on a wooden stretcher and framed for exhibition.

Grid which confirms the hypothesis of an outline created to reproduce the image in a larger scale (the artist was a muralist).

Probably created as a working sketch to later create an oversized mural painting.

## CONDITION

Support friability  
Varnish oxidation  
Inpaintings

Cracks

Loss  
Tears  
Warping

Dimples

Tears and edge losses

Ripples

“Portrait”: external pressure from the front side

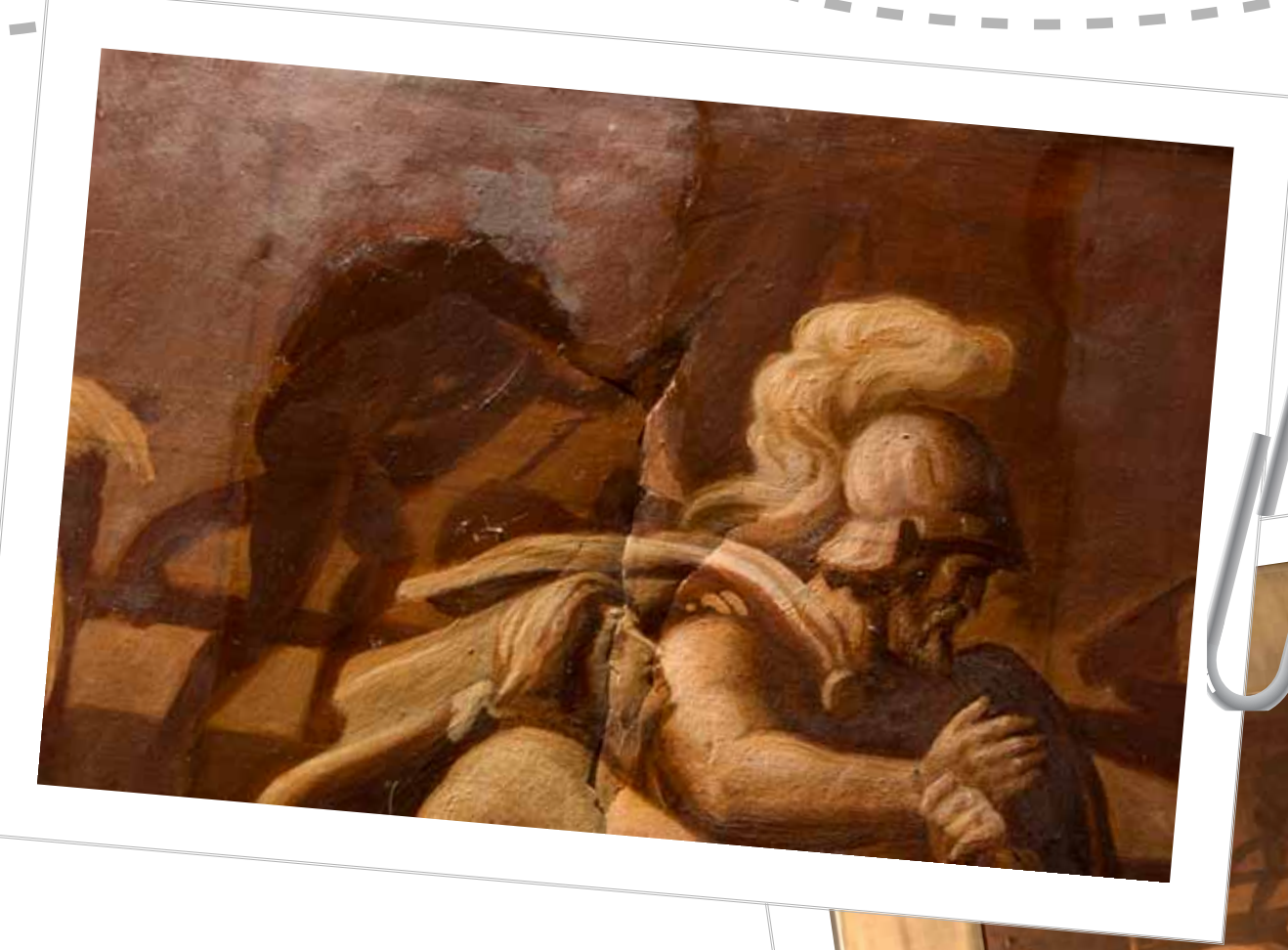
“Outline”: external pressure from the verso (mishandling)

Mechanical behavior of supports exposed to the environment

“Portrait”: produced by uneven tension  
• Some areas of the support adhered to the protective canvas  
• Strips adhered along the edges of the support



“Portrait of Pilar Garfías del Fierro”  
Detail of support warping



“Outline: Dido and Eneas”  
Support warping



After Treatment “Portrait of Pilar Garfías del Fierro”



After Treatment “Outline: Dido y Eneas”

## METHODOLOGY

**Objetivo:** Reverse the surface distortions so paintings can be exhibited

**Criteria:** Respect the artist intent  
Recover the esthetic integrity, according to the owners expectations  
Develop treatments starting with the less invasive, and progressively carry out more complex treatments as needed for each object

## TREATMENTS CARRIED OUT

### 1. RECOVERY OF SUPPORT DISTORSIONS

- Protective fabric and paper strips on the edge were discarded
- A “Gustav Berger Sandwich lining”, with *Beva*® film, *Mylar*® and a *polyester monofilament mesh* (vacuum hot table). This new support provided more rigidity, allowed stretching and offered protection from T° and RH changes

- The window mat, the fabric backing and adhesive residues were removed to allow the support to relax
- The varnish was removed to allow the painting layer to relax and make possible the flattening process
- **Humidification** and **flattening** under weights

### 2. STRUCTURAL STABILITY

- **Tears** were repaired with *Beva*® gel compatible with lining materials
- **Lining**
- Japanese paper **inserts** were adhered with *Beva*® film to the lining support

- **Lined** using japanese paper and wheat starch paste, which has enough adhesive power and is compatible with paper
- Adhered to an acid free **cardboard** with wheat starch paste
- **Inserts** of japanese paper and wheat starch paste

### 3. VISUAL RECOVERY

- **Varnish** removal to clear color distortions
- Selective removal of visually disturbing **old inpaintings**

- Surface **cleaning**
- **Fillings** placed on uneven areas
- **New inpaintings**

### 4. MOUNTING

- Attached and **stretched** to the original mounting stretcher with staples
- Framed, according to the artist original intent

- **Mounted** on a frame with glass and a conservation quality cardboard window mat, as per the owners request

## FINAL COMMENTS

- The artist intent of these two oil paintings on paper were quite different. This fact guided the successful treatments proposals. At the end, it was possible to exhibit both paintings after treatment.  
~The portrait was conceived as an easel painting placed on a stretcher as part of the artistic technique. This aspect was respected to avoid modifying the artist intent. For this reason, materials and methods were used that offered enough resistance to the support allowing it to be stretched.  
~The outline was created as a working sketch, that at some later time was mounted on a frame for exhibition.
- Reversing the surface distortions (warping) was the most challenging aspect of the treatment due to “paper memory”. The warping of the portrait persisted after several attempts to flatten it. Treatments at different levels were chosen starting with those less invasive until the expected results were obtained. The warping caused by uneven tension proved to be the hardest to reverse.
- Even though the search for information on the oil-painting-on-paper technique resulted in few and outdated results, paintings and paper conservators were able to adapt their technical knowledge in order to reach the objective and achieve the owners expectations, always respecting the artist intent.